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AUTHOR Stewart, Susan
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ABSTRACT

This discussion of the nature and role of communication skills in implementing job responsibilities of librarians and information specialists argues that the most important foundation of effective library leadership is communication. The paper begins by reviewing the literature on leadership and developing a set of leadership characteristics. It then presents a brief overview of the process of communication, some examples of the various types of communication, and ways in which communications are influenced; underscores the vital connection between leadership and effective communications; and suggests practical ways of assisting librarians, from first line supervisors to library directors, to enhance their communication skills, which, in turn, enhance their leadership abilities. In conclusion it is suggested that effective leadership is necessary to carry the profession to even greater levels of success. (18 notes, 17 references) (CGD)

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IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TO LIBRARY LEADERSHIP OR COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION

Susan Stewart

Life & Health Sciences/Physical Sciences Librarian

University of Nevada, Reno

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Susan Stewart

Importance of Effective Communication to Library Leadership or Communication, Communication, Communication

If, as library professionals, our primary goal is to satisfy the informational requirements of our users, we may need to develop better strategies to fulfill those requirements. The rate of change in society and technology and the competition for ever dwindling resources, such as funds and quality personnel, makes the need for developing more successful strategies critical. Library professionals, as professionals in all facets of society today, are becoming aware that being a good manager may not be enough. There has been a call for more sophisticated leadership skills. To achieve this I believe that we need to go back to the basics of leadership, communication skills. In the field of real estate it has long been said that the three most important factors in determining the value of a piece of property are 1) location, 2) location and 3) location. The following paper will propose that the three most important foundations of effective library leadership are 1) communication, 2) communication and 3) communication.

My experience with the power of communication and library leadership was formulated when I began library school at the University of Denver in 1983. Megatrends and In Search of Excellence had just been published and one of my most dynamic professors, Anne Mathews, was putting the finishing touches on

her book, Communicate!. There was also a rumor that Rutgers Library School was to be merged with their School of Communications. This seemed to me to be the genesis of how librarianship was going to meet the challenges of the escalating number of changes being felt in the profession, the society and the technology. To me, if effective communication skills was what librarians or information specialists were all about, we already had the key to successfully meeting these new challenges!

Communication skills seemed to be used everywhere, in assessing of user needs for collection development, in executing a thorough reference interview, in informing funding sources of our needs, in carrying out daily interactions between members of the library staff, in setting meaningful performance goals for individual library staff members, in working with vendors to fill various needs, in working with the media to inform our publics of our library's services. Everything seemed to be based on effective communication skills. Librarians already possessed the necessary foundation for effective leadership!

If we have this foundation, how we can enhance it to meet the changing needs of librarianship today? I will review the literature on the subject of leadership and develop a set of leadership characteristics; give a brief overview of the process of communication; underscore the vital connection between leadership and effective communications and lastly propose practical methods to assist librarians, from first line

supervisors to library directors, in becoming more effective in achieving the leadership necessary to carry our profession to even greater levels of success.

LEADERSHIP

I remember my first experience with the concept of leadership. I was about 10 years old and had gone to a church summer camp. As this was the "pre-boy crazy" period of my life I remember being extremely interested in the nature programs and the fellowship offerred in my church. At the end of the week the camp counselors chose a small group of campers to come back the next week for a "leadership" session. I remember being so thrilled yet confused, because my fellow campers had also voted me the "most neat" person in camp and I do not mean beautiful or exciting, I mean neat as in tidy.

Upon reflection, I can see there were many keys that could be gleaned from that experience that are appropriate to our discussion. First of all, the concept of leadership seems to require at least two people or a group interacting with one another, just as does effective communications. Secondly, the confirmation of the status was given by consensus of the group, based on the values that the group. The camp counselors evidently felt neatness and interest in the concepts being taught were important. Thirdly, I must have been able to communicate those behaviors to both the counselors and my fellow campers.

Fourth was that a cost was associated with leadership, because the special session was to cost extra in both time and money. I wish I could tell you what I learned at that session, but the cost was too much for my family to bear at the time. Which brings to mind another important facet of leadership behavior, it like other behaviors is a choice and we have control over the choices and our behavior. If we desire to achieve effective leadership we can imporve our behavior patterns and attain it!

Leadership seems to be on the lips and minds of every professional, be it librarians, nurses, corporation officers, politicians, military personnel, just about everyone and every form of media seems to be seeking this all encompassing goal. If the '60s were the "love generation", I submit the the '80s are the "leadership generation." Is leadership the answer to all our hopes and dreams? How do other theorists define leadership?

G. Edward Evans in Management Techniques for Librarians states that "a person is assumed to have taken on a leadership role when that person exercises influence over a group, including directing group activities toward a goal."[1]

The term leadership, similar to the term love, seems to be difficult to define, possibly because of the many personal experiences each individual brings to the concepts. Historically, theories of leadership centered around various uncontrollable factors such as genetics and timing. Early theorists believed in what is generally called the "great man"

theory. This meant that leaders were simply born that way. Either you were a born leader or you were not. The next informal theory regarding leadership was that if you were not born into it, as Bennis and Nanus state, "great events made leaders of otherwise ordinary people."[2] This is similar to the idea that "timing is everything" if you were in the right spot at the right time, you might be the next great leader.

In 1967 Fred Fiedler did some of the grassroots research on studying leadership, and his definition of leadership behavior is "the particular acts in which a leader engages in the course of directing and coordinating the work of his group members."[3] Fiedler's "Contingency Model" theory, "postulates that leadership effectiveness depends upon the appropriate matching of the individual's leadership style of interacting and the influence which the group situation provides."[4] In other words, the success of a leader is contingent on the person's personal characteristics and the situation the person finds him or herself in. At least this theory was a more hopeful theory than the preceding "great man" or "right timing" theories.

Next, political scientist, James MacGregor Burns, proposed two levels of leadership. The first is "transactional", which is primarily concerned with the actions necessary to carry on the daily routine of a business and the second is "transformational", which transforms the persons involved from the routine and motivates them to greater heights of production and self-

fullfillment. More specifically, he states that transformational leadership "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out separate but related, in the case of transactional leadership, become fused."[5]

Burns's theory was the basis of a recent research project by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, who interviewed and observed some 90 leaders from such varied backgrounds as business, academics, the arts, sports, and various social rights movements. Their research lead them to use this catchy phrase to define leadership, "managers do things right, leaders do the right thing."[6]

Based on their research, Bennis and Nanus proposed four strategies for becoming a leader, no matter if it is of a nation, a business, or a department. The four strategies are:

Strategy I: Attention Through Vision

An overpowering goal or focus of their energy

Strategy II: Meaning Through Communication

Ability to create meaning and share their vision

Strategy III: Trust Through Positioning

Persistence and integrity build confidence

Strategy IV: The Deployment of Self Through Positive Self-Regard

Self-knowledge and self-acceptance[7]

George Barbour Jr. and George Sipel at the Center for Excellence in Local Government in Palo Alto, California, suggest there are also four leadership behaviors:

1. Visioning
2. Communicating Your Vision
3. Acting on Your Vision
4. Caring about People and the Organization[8]

Tannenbaum and Schmidt state the above differently, "successful leaders understand themselves, the people they are dealing with, and the company and broader social environment in which they operate."[9]

As stated previously there are many definitions and characteristics of leadership. I would like to focus on the following characteristics, 1) knowledge of self, the group and the overall situation, 2) focus on a compelling need or vision to improve the group and situation, 3) ability to communicate that vision in terms of the receiver of that message, and 4) ability to adjust to feedback.

COMMUNICATION

What about communication? I believe not only is leadership impossible without effective communication, but that there are many similarities between leadership and effective communication skills. I would like to briefly discuss the process of communication; some types of communication, for example, verbal,

nonverbal and written and interference to the communication process.

Most of you probably remember your first introduction to the theory of communication science where you were probably presented a diagram similar to the following:

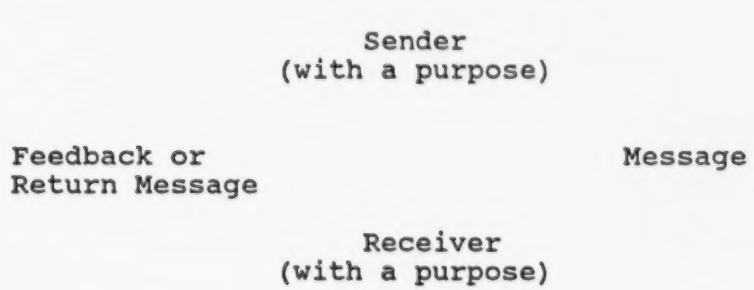

Figure 1. Communication Process

Source: Anne J. Mathews, Communicate! A Librarian's Guide to Interpersonal Relations (Chicago:American Library Association, 1983), p.2.

Basically, a sender formulates a message, based on the sender's background that is sent to a receiver. The message is sent by whichever means the sender choses, usually verbal, nonverbal or written. The receiver receives the message, and based upon the receiver's background and the perceived meanings of the symbols, accepts it. At that time the receiver gives the sender feedback about the message that may qualify or answer the senders original message. If the communication is effective, the two will have shared meanings and understandings.

The simplicity of the above diagram belies the sophistication that is required to actually make sure that the message that was sent was the one that was received. That is the whole key to effective communication. T. Harrell Allen in The Bottom Line states that "communication is simply sharing information with others. If it is effective it means shared meaning--shared understanding."[10] How do we acheive shared meaning and therefore shared understanding? Again using a circular diagram, such as a Venn diagram, "imagine the sender and receiver as large circles. Only to the extent that these circles overlap, representing similar meanings, can effective communication occur. If there is little overlap there is little understanding."[11] The basis is that the symbols used by both sender and receiver have the same meaning for both.

You will note in the above example, I have used two words, "Venn diagram" to conjure a picture in your mind of two overlapping circles that I did not diagram for you. As librarians I am assuming that we have certain symbols and meanings in common. But if I want to make sure that I have effectively communicated that concept with you, I would ask you if you understood or include an example of a Venn diagram to make sure my meaning was conveyed. This exemplifies one of the basic tenets of effective communication, make sure you are sending a message with the receiver's background or interests in mind. Shared meanings for symbols, in writing or speaking, are necessary for effective communication.

There are many factors that impact on how the receiver will understand the message you send. Such things as the individual's experience, abilities, culture, physical setting, focus of attention and even such things as the time of day are some of the factors that may impact on the effective communication process.

Verbal communications rely first on having a shared meaning for various sounds. If, for example, you are on the reference desk and a person calls in and only speaks Russian and neither you nor your colleagues speak Russian, it is very unlikely that the two of you will effectively communicate.

On a more complex level, even when two people speak the same language, the communications may not always have shared meanings for the symbols or sounds used. One person's experience with a word may be different from another's experience. For example, if your library has a video tape collection, is it VHS or BETA or both? This distinction will be important to the prospective library user.

The physical setting of where the communications take place may also have an impact on the effectiveness of the communication. The communication exchange in a coffee break discussion will probably have a far different structure and possible effectiveness than those in the library director's office. The same may be true for the time of day. Some people are more alert at one time of the day than they are at another.

The preceding discussion has focused on the basics for relatively minimal verbal communication to take place. More recently research has shown that another factor may have a higher level of credibility and effectiveness capability than verbal exchanges, that is nonverbal communications. In fact according to Allen "only 7 percent of a message's effect is carried by words, and the listener receives the other 93 percent through nonverbal means."[12]

Nonverbal communications and their importance have been studied more extensively in the past few decades. Not only have facial expressions been studied, but the idea of "body language", "dressing for success" and the tone of a person's voice have all been explored to further enable people to gather insight into what people are saying with their bodies, clothes and colors as well as their spoken words and silences.

Because of the potency and validity of nonverbal communications the axiom "You cannot not communicate"[13] best sums up the impact of communications, not just to leadership, but to just about everything! No matter what you do or do not do you are communicating information to those around you.

In terms of nonverbal communications in a library setting, what does your body language and/or facial expression do when the 13th person of the day asks, "Where is the Reader's Guide?" What about the atmosphere in your library, is your building effectively lighted, surroundings pleasant and inviting? Do you have enough parking or staff at peak user times? What about the

temperature of your building? These are subtle means of nonverbal communications that speak to our users and staff about how important we believe both their needs and ours are.

Written communications are an almost exclusively one-way form of communications. They go from the sender to the receiver with little or no means for immediate feedback or reinforcement. What do the signs in your building say to your users? How do you use written communications in your organization? Policies and procedures are essential in assisting staff to perform routine tasks, but the satisfaction of using only written memos as your chief method of communications to staff would not be conducive to effective communications. The inability to receive feedback or clairification of the message is lost on written communications. Thus we have the basic process of communication, some examples of the various types of communication, and ways in which communications are influenced.

COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP

Just how important is communication to leadership? We saw above that Bennis and Nanus see it as "Strategy II" in the linking of a person's vision with those able to assist in the ability to produce that vision. Ernest Steck in Leadership Communication may have summed it up best when he articulated "if communication is not all of the game of leadership, it is a big part."[14] In Peters and Waterman's report of excellent companies,

they reported that "the excellent companies are a vast network of informal, open communications."[15] Allen further affirms that "elements of leadership are of course all fused together through communication."[16] Communication seems to be almost taken for granted as a foundation for effective leadership.

I believe the following diagram best illustrates the overall linking function of communication to the concept of leadership:

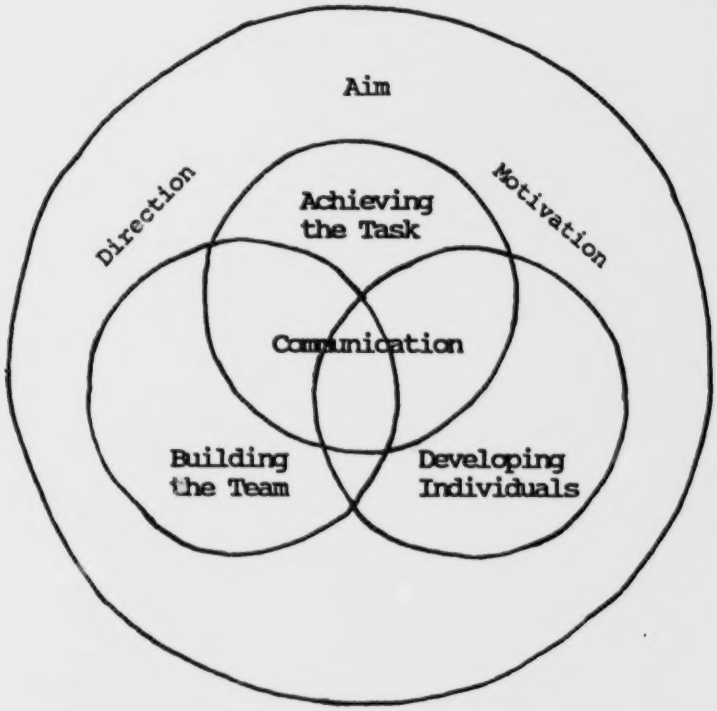

Figure 2. The Essentials of Team Leadership.

Source: Graham Strong, "Taking the Helm of Leadership Development," Training and Development Journal, (1986), 44.

But, I believe if we go back to the basic communication diagram and substitute the characteristics of leadership into the process you have the inseperable link between leadership and communication. See below:

Sender

(with knowledge of self, receiver and the situation)

Feedback (confirmation)

Message (Vision)

Receiver

(confirming group)

The question now is, how can we as librarians enhance our communication skills to meet the leadership needs that are necessary to face the challenges libraries are undergoing? I believe that we must begin at the root, with ourselves. It has already been postulated that leadership and communication skills are behaviors and that behaviors are learned. Next, we need to chose to learn or relearn those skills. Similar to Opus, the character in the "Bloom County" comic strip, who found when he was trying to lose weight, that it boils down to basics of "diet and exercise." Leadership is not a panacea that accepting and taking like a pill will solve all the world's problems without effort. If you are truly committed to your goals, the goals of your staff and the needs of your publics, I believe that you will

begin to see that enhancing your communication skills will enhance your leadership abilities.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

How you ask? I submit the following processes of change:

1. Awareness that your current behaviors may not be effective in fulfilling the desired results or needs fulfillment.
2. Assessment of your strengths and weaknesses.
3. Review the alternatives for change.
4. Commit to making the necessary changes.
5. Follow through.

How first can we become more aware of the behaviors that are not filling our needs and must be changed? Donald Riggs pointed out in 1985, "there is something seriously wrong when the most popular library workships are stress management and planning for early retirement."[17] He, I assume, became aware of this by reflecting on facts he received. He further states that national organizations such as ALA should offer more workshops and continuing education in the area of leadership. I agree that this would help, but I also believe that there are other strategies that could help more people if we became more aware of our own situation.

For many librarians and far more library supervisors the workshops that ALA offers and will offer are too far removed from

their reach in space and cost. I believe that we need to begin in our "own back yards." I believe this is important because though it is crucial that the library director be the leader, innovator and goal setter for the library as a whole, research by Fiedler "demonstrates that the first line supervisor plays an important role in determining group performance, group morale and job satisfaction."[18] Leadership needs to be pervasive throughout the organization, not just at the top, to be effective.

So the question again is "how?". I believe that we need to go back to the basics we were taught in school and remember that change begins with each one of us. How long has it been since you did an assessment of yourself, your publics and your staff? How long has it been since you felt you really communicated with each of those three and reflected on what is needed to enhance your goals and the needs of staff and public?

Formal interviews, questionnaires, or workshops are some formal assessment methods. But, you can often find very important information in the most infomal of settings. For example, listening to how you behave in certain situations and how your staff interact with each other and your publics can offer insight into the needs of your organization. The key is to listen sincerely, actively and objectively.

How else are we able to use communication skills to enhance our leadership roles? Opportunity for communication is another

method. If you feel that staff workshops on communications are not in the budget, how about some simple suggestion box approaches for both staff and publics; newsletters; weekly, monthly or annual question and answer periods; evaluation sessions of where we are now and where we are going are other methods. Setting the tone for open communications to take place will go along way in improving the goals of the library. At UNR we have found that "brown bag" lunches on "hot" library issues effective in promoting open communications. The realization that you as a leader cannot do everything and do not have all the answers can only be remedied by giving other people input into the process.

Another step in the effective use of communications to enhance leadership skills is by feedback. By opening up the opportunity for communications and listening you have taken two of the basic steps. But to make sure your message was understood or that you understand the other person's message or response you must request or present the necessary feedback. This may be done by restating what you believe the person was saying or asking a question about the message.

Once you have made sure that the message that was received was the one that was sent you need to examine alternatives for solution of the situation. Usually there is a cost associated with each alternative, so the decision as to which alternative will have to take into account the costs and the benefits. Once

a decision is arrived at the leader and group must commit to the changes and follow through on them.

Let me give you an example of the above. I have had the opportunity to work with a few successful library leaders. One of them is Joyce Ball. Joyce had been at UNR for many years before moving on to direct the California State University Library at Sacramento. One day a colleague and I were visiting her to learn about the serials and acquisition system that they had had for a few years and we were considering purchasing. In the process of one of her staff member's explanation of the system's interface with the circulation system, a problem was discovered. Joyce immediately had the circulation supervisor come up to discuss the situation, while my colleague and I saw their serials component. In about 30 minutes a problem that had been known to only the acquisition personnel came to the awareness of the director, who assessed the situation, discussed the impact and alternatives, made the decision and committed the staff to its implementation. In this situation everyone won, the staff, the publics using the library and the director. I believe the communication techniques that Joyce used also reinforced the fact that she was willing to listen to her staff and wanted them all to succeed in the common goal of giving their publics the optimum service possible.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion I want to reinforce that I believe that effective leadership is based on 1) awareness of self, the group and the situation of those two, 2) after an assessment of the needs of the self and group focusing on a vision or need to fill the needs 3) communicate the vision in terms of the receivers and 4) carry through and adjust to feedback. In essence, focus on 1) communication, 2) communication and 3) communication.

We have the power to change and to succeed, as librarians we are well schooled in the tools to be anything we want to be. I believe that through the preceeding steps and using positive communication skills, we can regain our position of leadership.

In the references section of this paper I have included several books that I have found helpful in assessing and improving my communication skills. I hope they will be of help to you on the road to effective leadership.

NOTES

[1] G. Edward Evans, Management Techniques for Librarians (New York: Academic Press, 1983), p. 119.

[2] Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p.5.

[3] Fred Feidler, A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), p. 36.

[4] Ibid., p. 347.

[5] James MacGregor Burns, Leadership (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 20.

[6] Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 21.

[7] Ibid., pp. 26-68.

[8] George P. Barbour and George A. Sipel, "Excellence in Leadership: Public Sector Model," Public Management 68 (August, 1986): 3-5.

[9] Robert Tannenbaum and Warren Schmidt, "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern," Harvard Business Review 36, no. 2 (March-April, 1958): 129.

[10] T. Harrell Allen, The Bottom Line: Communicating in the Organization (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1979), p. 9.

[11] Ibid., p. 12

[12] Ibid., p. 18

[13] Ibid., p. 18

[14] Ernest L. Stech, Leadership Communication (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1983), p. 9.

[15] Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr., In Search of Excellence, Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982) pp. 21-22.

[16] T. Harrell Allen, The Bottom Line: Communicating in the Organization (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1979), p. 99.

[17] Donald E. Riggs, "Leadership is Imperative," Technicalities 5, no. 11 (November, 1985) 10.

[18] Fred Fiedler, A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967) p. 236.

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